

Interview to Craig Bartlett

Ladies and gentlemen; girls and boys; and, specially, cybernauts and Hey, Arnold! fans! It's a huge pleasure for me to show you this interview to the cartoonist Craig Bartlett, creator of the series these virtual pages homage. Since now, thousand of infinite thanks to Craig, to allow this fan reach a dream. Nothing else, people. Enjoy the interview.

(GREEN text belongs to Megawacky Max)

(BLACK text belongs to Craig Bartlett)

(Interview date: March 17, 2000)

- Hello, Craig. Thanks for the interview. There are two important points here: 1) My english won't help some times, so, I'm sorry if you don't understand parts of the text. 2) I haven't seen most of the Hey Arnold! episodes. I mean, get ready for a kind of different interview. Can you work with this?

- Sure, looks like english to me.

- Okay, let's begin. I'll start with a wide know request. Tell me about you and your past.

- Born Seattle 10-18-56. Grade school in Seattle, wanted to grow up to be an artist or a secret agent. High school in Anacortes, WA. Developed love for nature and solitude in my teenage years because I lived in the country, miles from friends. Graduated H.S. '74, Museum Art School in Portland, Oregon, foreign study in Siena, Italy, finally graduated Evergreen State College in '81. Somewhere in last year decided to drop fine art and pursue animation. First job at Will Vinton Studios '82-'88, a full filmmaking apprenticeship. Learned stop-motion animation on features, shorts, commercials (Will is the California Raisin guy). Came to Los Angeles to do "Penny" cartoons for "PeeWee's Playhouse" in '87, moved to LA for good in '88. Created Arnold summer '88 in short film "Arnold Escapes from Church." Made 3 Arnold shorts '88-'90 in my living room. Hired at Klasky Csupo to be story editor and director, first season of "Rugrats." At K/C I met the future Arnold writers, and the Nick execs who ended up greenlighting "Hey Arnold!" pilot episode in January '94. Produced 8-minute pilot that eventually became the episode "24 Hours to Live." Original version premiered as the short before "Harriet the Spy," Nick's first movie. Arnold premiered October '96 in Nick's new primetime slot, Mondays and Wednesdays. By then we had a whole season of 20 eps, and after 5 years of continuous production, Nick has ordered a total of 100 eps, a TV movie, and a theatrical feature. I'm currently working on shows 85-100, the TV movie, and the feature.

- Did Matt Groening help you in the pilot episode?

- We pitched our story to him, and he gave us good notes. In particular, he suggested that since the kids are promised a fight, that the show should end with a fight. We agreed, and show Iggy and Joey fighting in the end, even though they're ignored by the crowd. He loved Grandma's fly, and suggested that he become a recurring character.

- Did you help him in any of his projects?

- I drew Arnold comics for his magazine "Simpsons Illustrated."

- What about a crossover between Matt and Craig's mind? What kind of show would we get?

- Matt and I both find crossovers scary, though I've always wanted Homer to stumble into one of our scenes. I love Homer -- he's one of the greatest cartoon characters of all time.

- Have you ever visited pages related to Hey Arnold? (what a dull question...)

- Sure, I visit Phoebe's site a lot. I've used Phoebe and Dons' links to check out all the sites.
- How do you feel when you see such a fanaticism for something YOU created?
 - It's very, very flattering. It proves to me that Arnold and Helga are living, breathing characters in the minds of others. What could be better than that?
- Did you ever expect your show would be such interesting for all sort of people? I mean, a lot of people with very different ages?
 - We wanted all ages to like it. You put something out there and hope.
- Okay, this is a risky question. (Answer risky questions ONLY if you want to) Did you ever read any Fan Fiction from any fan?
 - I've read some fanfics, but I have to read so much Arnold writing for a living that it's hard to read stuff I'm not actually making this week.
- What do you think, in general, of the fan's fanaticism? It's just fine, or totally exaggerated?
 - Fanatics are cool. Helga is a fanatic.
- How's a normal day in a cartoonist's life?
 - I live two miles from the studio in sunny, bucolic Burbank, so my commute is easy. I work with the fifty or so people in the Arnold crew, and we concentrate on twenty or so stories at any given time, including movies, episodes, and books. It's a dream life, if what you're after is creativity. It can be stressful, because there are a lot of people to make happy. Oddly enough, people manage to be miserable in almost any situation. My mom always told me this, though, so I can handle it.
- What's your secret to handle all that? Hot showers? Caffeined coffee cups? Long naps? ... Breakfasts with raspberries?
 - Everything you mentioned but the naps. I can't take naps, they conk me out. I rollerblade and shoot baskets and walk in the hills. And I plan vacations, trips, interaction with people outside this insane LA showbiz community.
- Another risky question. I have seen most of the fans "hate" Lila. Did you expect this?
 - Yeah, 'cause Lila is very cartoonily "perfect," designed to drive more real, ironic, and intelligent people like Helga crazy. I'm impressed by the hatred she inspires. I credit it to the fans' intense, identifying love for Helga.
- Okay, there's a movie project, right?
 - Yes, I've written draft two. Paramount still has to greenlight the production of the movie. "Any day now."
- Will we know Arnold's last name in the movie?
 - I don't think so.
- Will we see any "lost character" again in the movie, like Vincent (Pigeon Man), Stoop Kid, Sam the Sewer King, Mr. Smith, Torvald or Nocturnal Ned?
 - Most of the above will appear in our TV Movie "Arnold Saves the Neighborhood."
- I won't ask about Arnold and Helga's relationship in the movie 'cause it's kind of a predictable thing, but... What about

Gerald and Phoebe's? Will they say "the words" to each other during the movie?

- I doubt it. Mostly they'll keep it to meaningful eye contact.

- After the movie... Will we see new seasons?

- Who knows? I suggest that everyone who reads this, sit down and write a letter to Nickelodeon, demanding them.

- (We'll do, Craig) Will Eugene have a "Lucky Day", someday?

- Maybe. Eugene has plenty of bad luck in the movie.

- EXTREME risky question. What could happen if Arnold's grandparents have an accident (let's put them in a hospital. I don't want any down, specially for such a good characters like Phil and Gertrude). What would happen with Arnold and the boarding house? Could Arnold manage a whole boarding house and its -nutty- boarders?

- I don't think I could do that to Arnold... things are bad enough for him without parents!

- Can you tell us Peapod Kid's real name? Or... Is "Peapod" actually his real name?

- He's simply known as Peapod Kid; it refers to his role in "Downtown as Fruits."

- Do you travel?

- When I was in my twenties, I thought travel was the most important thing you can do. I love to travel.

- Have you ever been in *ahem* Argentina, or South America? (the fans throw empty soda cans to Max)

- In 1992-93 I went around the world making a world's fair film called "Postcards." One of seven countries we filmed was Brazil. I shot scenes of the Carnaval in Rio. I loved Rio, but did not make it to Argentina.

- Will the characters be in fifth grade, someday?

- We thought about it, but decided that, like Charlie Brown, the characters should stay forever fourth graders... like the series chronicles one endless, incredible year. But "The Pataxis" is a spin-off I'm working on that picks up when Helga is a teenager.

- What could happen if Oskar wins the lottery?

- He'd somehow manage to lose all the money.

- What happened with Mai Hyunh? Will we see her again?

- We almost brought her back this season for "Family Man," a Mr. Hyunh show, but changed our minds. Mai is doing fine, has a job, loves her dad.

- What do you need to work at Nickelodeon?

- You mean experience? Many people that work here came with an art school background but no actual animation experience. It helps, but is not required. So Nick is a good place for artists who are starting out in television.

- Is it hard to think in new ideas for episodes?

- Somehow we always come up with 40 more premises every year. I actually find it easier than ever; the characters have

such rich histories now, and there are so many of them. But it's still hard to come up with good "Arnold" eps.

- Where do you (or the writers) get ideas from, basically?

- Many of the stories are based on things that actually happened to us as kids, then embellished to be funnier. Steve likes to get ideas from old Andy Griffith episodes. It's hard not to reference some TV show or other. "The Simpsons" has already done just about every possible kid storyline in the universe.

- Who are the two most important people in your life, and WHY? (not your family members. I know families ARE important)

- Well, the top ten truly are in my OWN family, and my siblings, parents, relatives. How can I list two people before my wife Lisa, and my kids Matt and Katie? They teach me stuff every single day. But non-family members Jim Lang and Tuck Tucker are very important, both for the same reason: I can't imagine making stuff without Jim's music or Tuck's drawings, and that applies to future projects beyond Arnold.

- You are quite open with us, the fans. Do you think the other show's creators are as the open as you among the fans of their own shows?

- I imagine. I mean, they must have websites too...

- Thanks a lot, Craig. Interviewing you was one of my life goals. Thanks for creating such a COOL show, thanks for introduce that football head kid to us and thanks for this interview. Thanks for all, Craig. And please... do never change.

- 'kay!